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Article

Voting and Values: Grassroots Elections in Rural and Urban China

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Abstract
Authoritarian leaders often claim that they promote democratic institutions such as elections and democratic values. In China, the central propaganda often promotes the right and duty of citizens to vote in local elections as well as the importance of citizens' input into the policy making process. However, there is often a gap between government rhetoric and reality. In this article, we use the China General Social Survey (CGSS) 2013 to evaluate the determinants of voting in local elections and democratic values (attitudes) in rural and urban China. The results show that respondents with higher education tend to have lower levels of democratic values and participate less in local elections, but respondents with only compulsory education are more likely to display democratic orientations and vote. This suggests the relative success as well as the limits of authoritarian democratic propaganda.

Keywords
China; democratic values; education; grassroots elections; voting

Issue
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1. Introduction

In 2012, during the 18th Party Congress, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) announced the "12 Core Socialist Values", and "democracy" was near the top of the list behind "prosperity". The list also includes "freedom", "equality" and "justice". Interestingly, these are also some of the key terms used to describe democratic values in other countries in North America and Western Europe. In addition, the CCP also promotes elections especially voting for grassroots leaders in rural and urban China. However, the CCP defines democratic values, such as public participation in government and voting, as a duty rather than a right. Thus, the term "democracy" may have a different meaning for citizens in China than in the western democracies.

In general, much of the previous literature suggests that democratic values, such as the importance of voting and having a voice in the policy making process, tend to develop among the more educated urban middle class (Boix & Stokes, 2003; Lipset, 1959; Moore, 1966). However, national surveys for the last two decades show that over 70% of respondents (rural and urban) support the central leadership (Dickson, 2016). Despite rapid urbanization and increased levels of education, general support among the middle class for the CCP and the single party regime remain relatively strong (Chen, 2013; Chen & Dickson, 2008; Chen & Lu, 2011; Tsai, 2007). At the same time, rural and urban residents are voting in competitive grassroots elections (Li, 2003; O'Brien & Li, 2000; Tang, 2016). Thus, do more educated middle class urban residents hold stronger democratic values? What is the relationship between democratic values and voting in China?

One interesting puzzle is that even though there is wide spread support for the authoritarian regime most citizens tend to vote in grassroots elections and display a relatively high level of democratic values. Indeed, previ-

ous studies and surveys show that most Chinese respondents agree that political participation and individuals having a voice in the policy making process is an important part of the democratic process (Chen & Zhong, 2002; Shi, 1999). One critical debate is how these democratic values influence voting within an authoritarian regime. For example, Shi (1999) suggests that having democratic values promotes political efficacy and increases the likelihood of voting in grassroots elections because they believe even limited democratic institutions can replace corrupt local officials. However, Chen and Zhong (2002) argue that within an authoritarian regime people with more democratic orientations believe local elections are ineffective in replacing corrupt cadres and decide to abstain as a form of protest. Yet, both Shi (1999) and Chen and Zhong (2002) imply causality regarding the influence of democratic values on voting. Indeed, while there seems to be a correlation between voting and democratic values, the direction of causality is unclear. More importantly, they presuppose a positive relationship between education and democratic values. However, previous studies on China's grassroots elections have yet to disentangle the effect of education on democratic values and voting respectively. Moreover, there needs to be greater emphasis on the definition of democracy in the Chinese context.

In this article, we examine the possible relationship between voting in grassroots elections, democratic orientations, and education within an authoritarian regime. Previous studies examine democratic orientation and how this may influence voting either by promoting participation or abstention. In these studies, voting is the dependent variable and democratic values are the key independent variables. However, we argue that it is also important to look at how voting and education can influence democratic orientation. Using the 2013 China General Social Survey (CGSS), we find that education has strong influence on both voting behavior and democratic values. Moreover, it is not just the level of education, but the type of education (compulsory versus secondary) that affect voting and values. The results show that respondents with no education and those with college degrees tend to have the lowest voter turnout rates, suggesting a curvilinear relationship between voting and education. Yet, college educated respondents display the lowest proportion of democratic values. Thus, higher education is associated with lower voter participation as well as lower democratic orientations for both rural and urban residents. One implication is that respondents with compulsory education (9th grade) or below are more likely to absorb state messaging regarding their duty to vote and accept the CCP definitions of democracy. On the other hand, higher educated respondents have a more diluted view of their civic duty to vote and are less acceptant of the CCP presentation of democratic duties (values).

This article is divided into four sections. For the first part, we examine the general literature on grassroots governing bodies in China as well as the relationship between voting, democratic values, and education. We also examine one of the key debates regarding the relationship between democratic values and voting behavior. The second section covers the theoretical assumptions and three key hypotheses. The first hypothesis examines voting as the dependent variable and democratic values and education as the main independent variables. The second hypothesis analyzes democratic values as the dependent variable, with voting and education as the main independent variables. The third hypothesis includes CCP membership as the independent variable and voting as the dependent variable in order to isolate the effect of education on voting. The third section is the descriptive and statistical analysis. We present two sets of regression models: one with voting as the dependent variable and the other with democratic orientation as the dependent variable. We find the level of education is a key explanatory factor regarding a respondent's willingness to perform their democratic duty (voting) and acceptance of the CCP democratic values. The fourth and final section is the concluding comments.

2. Literature Review

Democratic values under the CCP definition reflects citizens' collective duty to vote, as opposed to the western definition of liberal democracy that emphasizes individual rights and freedom. As Shi (1999) argues that the CCP promotes the idea that voting is citizens' duty, democracy in China indicates "duty" rather than "rights". Tang (2016) also identifies the unique conception of democracy within China and the need to separate liberal democracy from Chinese definition of democracy. Indeed, Dickson (2016) demonstrates that both political leaders and ordinary citizens in China perceive democracy as citizens' contributions to the state through political participation rather than citizens' individual rights and freedom. Perry (2008) argues that the increase of protests in China is a sign of "rules consciousness" and not "rights consciousness" (p. 47) and states that "political rights in modern China were consistently regarded as bound up with a moral responsibility to the larger political community" (p. 46). Therefore, democratic values in the Chinese context reflects a sense of duty to participate (including voting), rather than pursuits of individual rights.

The CCP promotes this conception of democracy through propaganda posters and state media. Through media, the CCP fosters a sense of duty to vote in local elections and also advocates the importance of indirect elections at the municipal, provincial and central levels. Beijing's Election Committee posts posters across the city that encourage people to vote in district people's congress elections. The posters connect vote to democracy as well as party leadership and rule abiding behaviors. For instance, one poster says "Cherish democratic rights. Cast a sacred and solemn vote". Other posters include wordings such as "Exercise electoral rights in

accordance with law" and "Uphold a party leadership. Uphold and carry forward democracy". While the party-state uses words such as rights and democracy, they effectively connect democratic rights to a sense of duty and support for the current party leadership. Furthermore, the word "democracy" frequently appears on state media's news articles. For instance, a search for a word "democracy" in Chinese ("民主") on the People's Daily ("人民网") web page produces over 240,000 articles. Indeed, scholars argue that education and state media indoctrinate people with the CCP definition of democracy (Lu, Aldrich, & Shi, 2014; Lu & Shi, 2015).

Western notions of democratic values are strongly associated with voting and education. Scholars suggest higher levels of education are associated with democratic values and in turn these values promote political participation (Cho, 2015; Evans & Rose, 2012; McAllister & White, 2017). McAllister and White (2017) examine the World Values Survey (WVS) from 1990–2012 and find that education has the strongest influence on a support for democracy. In China, scholars find similar patterns regarding education and democratic values. For instance, Chen and Zhong (1998) use a 1995 urban Beijing survey and show that higher levels of education are positively associated with greater democratic values. Zhong (2005) conducted a 2000 survey in rural Jiangsu, an economically developed yet rural area, and finds that along with other factors a higher level of education positively influences democratic values. Similarly, Lu (2004) finds the same results using the 2001 WVS in China.

Rural and urban grassroots elections represent the CCP attempt to promote party-state vision of participation and democracy. In the countryside, the lowest level of administration is the town, and within each town there are a number of village committees VCs (rural grassroots units). VC members are responsible for key village resources, such as collective land, and they also have a level of autonomy from the town government regarding local governance and policy implementation (Benewick, Tong, & Howell, 2004; Gui, Cheng, & Ma, 2006; Kennedy, 2002). In urban areas, the lowest administrative level is the street office and under each street office are several resident committees (RCs). However, RCs tend to have less autonomy and manage fewer resources than their rural counterparts (Heberer, 2008; Huang, 2008; Read, 2000). As a result, several scholars suggest that voter turnout tends to be lower for RC elections than for VCs (Chen & Yao, 2005; Gui et al., 2006).

Several factors may influence voting behavior in rural and urban grassroots elections. Older residents tend to vote more than younger professionals even in the urban grassroots elections (Xiong, 2008). While education seems to have a positive influence on voting in western democracies, several studies find that education is negatively correlated with voting in China. Zheng and Zhu (2013) use the CGSS for 2006 and they find the high school and college educated rural and urban respondents are less likely to vote. Read (2003) finds the relatively new class of urban homeowners are more likely to participate in local elections. These residents have a greater stake in the RC elections regarding the need for services such as trash collections and upkeep of public spaces.

Although voting in grassroots elections is common in China, it is unclear how democratic values influence voting behavior. The debate is whether democratic orientation promotes participation or abstention in grassroots elections. Shi (1999) suggests that citizens' democratic orientations have a positive influence on voting in China. In a 1991 nationwide survey, Shi (1999) examines citizens' voting behaviors in rural and urban grassroots elections as well as the elections for deputies to local people's congress at both township and county levels. The election quality for the grassroots and people's congress vary by level of competitiveness. A semi-competitive election has multiple candidates for each seat whereas non-competitive typically have one candidate for each available position. Shi (1999) demonstrates that more educated citizens with greater democratic orientations are more likely to participate in semi-competitive elections, but they tend to abstain from non-competitive elections. Furthermore, the perception that semi-competitive elections can replace corrupt local leaders increases internal efficacy and this is associated with a higher voter turnout. Therefore, Shi (1999) concludes that higher educated people hold democratic values and they vote in local elections to articulate their interests in replacing local officials and fostering democracy.

However, some scholars argue that educated citizens who hold democratic values within an authoritarian regime are more likely to abstain from voting. For example, Zhong and Chen (2002) conducted a survey in rural Jiangsu province in 2000, and find that people who have democratic orientations, internal efficacy, and a higher level of education are less likely to vote in the village committee elections. In addition, Zheng and Zhu (2013) use the 2006 CGSS to examine factors that influence voter behavior in rural and urban grassroots elections, and they find that democratic values have no significant influence on voting. Chen and Zhong (2002) evaluate a 1995 survey conducted in urban Beijing and illustrate that respondents with democratic orientations and internal efficacy are less likely to vote, whereas those who support the authoritarian regime are more likely to vote. These citizens abstain from voting, because the "constraints are incompatible with their democratic values" (Chen & Zhong, 2002, p. 185). Moreover, people who vote in these elections also display a level of compliance and support for the central leadership.

The notion that citizens who only complete compulsory education are more likely to support the authoritarian system and participate in grassroots elections is similar to previous studies that examine the relationship between education and regime support. Geddes and Zaller (1989) as well as Key (1961) suggest that the educational experience, especially compulsory education, can

have a direct influence on an individual's political opinion. However, citizens who complete higher education or college (post compulsory) learn to evaluate rather than simply absorb state information and they may even begin to resist state messages and propaganda. Thus, these educated individuals may also abstain from voting within the authoritarian system.

Yet these studies assume a positive relationship between levels of education and democratic values. The existing literature adopts the western notion of liberal democracy that focuses on individual rights and freedom. As a result, previous studies start with the assumption that education increases democratic values, and examine whether this orientation encourages people to vote or abstain. In this study, we start with the CCP definition of democracy and test the notion of duties rather than rights. As Key (1961) suggests, compulsory education and party-state propaganda may have a strong influence on citizens' perception of democratic values and strengthen their sense of duty. However, given the CCP definition of democratic values, it is more likely that higher educated citizens (post compulsory) and professionals tend to have a weaker sense of duty. These educated citizens may choose to not vote, and may display lower levels of commitment to their democratic duties (lower democratic values). Indeed, non-voting may not reflect stronger rights consciousness in a liberal democratic vein, but rather a form of noncompliance with their perceived duties.

3. Hypothesis and Measures

In order to test the difference between rights and duties, we evaluate three hypotheses. The first hypothesis examines an influence of democratic values on voting. Shi (1999) adopts the western definition of democratic values and argues that voters with democratic values are more likely to vote to replace local officials. However, we start with the CCP definition of "duty to vote" rather than the western definition of individual rights. Thus, when democratic values are defined as "duty to vote", respondents with higher levels of democratic values should be more likely to vote. Therefore, we test (H1) democratic values hypothesis: *respondents with higher level of democratic values are more likely to vote in grassroots elections*.

The second hypothesis investigates the impact of education on voting and democratic values respectively. The general assumption in the literature is that greater education is positively associated with voting (Boix & Stokes, 2003; Lipset, 1959; Moore, 1966). Scholars also suggest that education is positively associated with the western notion of democratic values (Cho, 2015; Evans & Rose, 2012; McAllister & White, 2017). Overall education seems to be the driving force influencing democratic values (rights consciousness) and voting. Furthermore, the literature assumes a covariation of education and democratic values and examines their effect on voting (Chen & Zhong, 2002; Shi, 1999). However, with democracy defined as duty to vote, theoretically "democratic values and voting" should correspond, rather than "education and democratic values". In other words, we suggest education should have a similar effect on both democratic values and voting. Thus, we examine two dependent variables, democratic values and voting, and we test (H2) education hypothesis: *education influences democratic values and voting in the same direction*.

The third hypothesis further assesses an influence of education on voting by considering CCP memberships. Other studies indicate that compulsory education will strengthen citizens' support for the state and conform to the political views of the regime (Geddes & Zaller, 1989; Key, 1961). This also suggests that people who attain higher levels of education may challenge these positive perceptions of the state. However, starting with the CCP definition of democratic values as a civic duty, higher education should reduce the effect of indoctrination and propaganda as well as dilute their sense of duty. Thus, educated respondents are less likely to vote. Yet, even among educated, if respondents are CCP members, then they should have a much stronger sense of duty to participate in local elections. Thus, we test (H3) the CCP membership hypothesis: *educated CCP members are more likely to vote than educated non-party members*.

We use the 2013 CGSS to investigate the hypotheses. The CGSS is a collaborative survey with Renmin University of China, Department of Sociology, and the Survey Research Center of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Since 2003 the CGSS has conducted several nationwide surveys and the 2013 survey has a random sample of over 11,000 respondents. This sample size is much larger than that of the 2011 Asian Barometer Surveys in China (N = 3,473) and the 2012 WVS in China (N = 2,300). The large sample size is one of the key advantages of the survey because it reduces the standard error and enables more precise analysis. For example, education variable divides respondents according to five levels of educational attainment, and each of the five categories contain more than 1,000 observations. Finally, the 2013 CGSS contains a specific set of questions on democratic values. The survey questions directly inquire people's perceptions of democracy and offer a suitable operationalization of democratic values. Some previous studies tend to use "demand for democracy" as conceptualization of democratic values, but this assumes a liberal democracy definition (Chen & Zhong, 2002; Shi, 1999). Instead, the CGSS's questions examine perceptions of democratic values such as voting and people's voice in government.

Table 1 of the Annex displays the key variable names and definitions as well as percentage and frequencies from the 2013 CGSS. The four key variables are voting, democratic values, levels of education, and CCP membership. Voting is reported participation in the last election. Although the survey age range is from 14 to 94 years old, we only include respondents over

the age of 20 to ensure a sample of possible voters over the age of 18 for the last election (grassroots election occur every three years). Voting is dependent variable in the first set of regression models and independent variable in the second set of regression models. Democratic values is an index combining the following three survey questions on democratic values: (1) democracy means the government should be for the people ("民主就是政府要为民做主"), (2) a country is a democracy only when ordinary people have direct voices and decision power on important state and local matters ("只有老百姓对国家和地方的大事都有直接的发言权或决定权, 才算是民主"), (3) a country is a democracy if ordinary people have rights to vote for their own representatives to discuss important state and local matters ("如果老百姓有权选举自己的代表去讨论国家和地方的大事, 也算是民主"). The answers to each question are coded dichotomously as either "agree" or "disagree" and comprise the democratic values index that ranges from 3 to 6 (6 is the highest level of democratic values). Democratic values is independent variable in the first set of regression models and dependent variable in the second set of regression models.

Education is self-reported completion of specific grade levels. The key distinction is the difference between completion of compulsory education (middle school or 9 years) and post compulsory education (high school and college). The number of respondents with CCP membership accounts for 10% of the entire sample. This is slightly higher than the 6% national percentage of CCP members.

The control variables include generation, election quality, class status, home ownership status, and gender. To test generational influence, we divide the population into two groups: those born before and after 1968. This is a delineation based on respondents who came of age during the reform era (born after 1968) and those who came of age before. County level election quality is also a self-reported measure based on the individual question whether or not the respondent knows the election process. Only about 30% of the respondents could identify the type of election process. The elections vary from open nominations and competitive elections to no elections (i.e. appointed positions). For those who know the process, 58% reported an open election process. We then examine the number of respondents who reported open elections within the county, if at least half reported an open election then we code it as "open elections". We find a clear variation in election quality at the county level. Class status is a self-reported measure of class ranging from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). The largest proportion is the 5th category or the middle class at 33%. Both homeownerships and gender are measured dichotomously.

4. Analysis

The descriptive data suggests no clear relationship between voting and democratic values. Table 2 of the Annex shows that only about 50% of respondents with the highest level of democratic orientations are likely to vote. While respondents who have democratic values are more likely to vote than those who do not, about half of the respondents who display democratic values did not vote at all. Thus, the data does not easily resolve the democratic orientation and voter abstention debate (Chen & Zhong, 2002; Shi, 1999). Indeed, there can be a number of reasons for not voting, from apathy to busy schedules, as well as diminished sense of duty.

As Gui et al. (2006), Chen and Yao (2005), and Xiong (2008) point out, voter turnout is much lower in urban grassroots elections. There is a 14% difference in the likelihood to vote between rural and urban respondents. This is possibly due to the fact that urban RCs have fewer resources and decision-making power than elected VC members (Xiong, 2008).

Generational differences, election quality and homeownership have an influence on voting, while gender and class have little impact. The majority, just over 60%, of younger respondents (under 45) did not vote, but the majority of the older respondents voted. This pattern holds for both rural and urban grassroots elections. Indeed, as Xiong (2008) suggests the vast majority (64%) of the older urban respondents voted in the last election as opposed to 36% of the younger generation. Election quality can also influence voter behavior especially within an authoritarian regime. In fact, the majority of respondents (58%) did not vote in the closed non-competitive elections, while close to 60% of the respondents that experienced an open election process participated in the election. The descriptive data also shows that homeownership has a positive influence on voting in local elections. As Read (2003) suggests, homeowners are more politically active than renters and tend to be involved in grassroots elections especially in the urban areas.

Gender and class status have little effect on voting behavior. The proportion of lower and higher classes are just as likely to vote (or not vote) as the middle class. Unlike the middle class expectations within the traditional modernization literature, such as Lipset (1959) and Moore (1966), voting behavior of middle class respondents are no different than other classes. Gender also has little influence on voting. However, females are slightly less likely to vote than male respondents.

One of the most striking determinates on voting is education. Table 3 of the Annex displays the non-linear pattern of influence. The smallest proportion of voters are among respondents with the lowest and highest levels of education. Indeed, only 33% of college educated respondents voted in the last election. However, majority of respondents, who attended or only completed compulsory education, voted in the last grassroots election. It is the middle educated rather than the middle class who have a higher proportion of political participation. This reflects Zheng and Zhu (2013) as well as Li's (2016) findings regarding the non-linear effect of education on voting. Table 4 of the Annex shows the similar non-linear

relationship between education and voting among CCP members. However, compared to the entire sample, CCP members tend to have higher educational attainment. About 67% of the CCP members completed higher education while only 35% of the total sample completed higher education. Overall CCP members are far more likely to vote than non-party members.

The regression analysis suggests a similar pattern observed in the descriptive tables. Table 5 of the Annex displays four logit regression models with voting in the last election as dependent variable. This is dichotomous variable and we used a logit model. As the descriptive tables suggest, Model 1 shows the statistical significance of democratic values, elections quality, and generation as well as homeownership, and CCP membership. Gender and class have no influence on voting. The variable "rural" is 1 for rural and 0 for urban. As the descriptive statistics suggest, rural respondents are more likely to vote. Education is not statistically significant in Model 1, but when we add the squared education term (quadratic) in Model 2 to test for a non-linear influence we find that education has a curvilinear influence on voting.

Model 3 only examines rural respondents. Interestingly, the effect of democratic values is not as strong as urban respondents, but it is still positive and statistically significant. Thus, a sense of duty (state conception of democratic values) seems to have a positive association with voting. Education remains strong and statistically significant. Also, males are more likely to vote than females in rural grassroots elections.

Finally, Model 4 examines urban respondents. In this model, democratic values are more strongly correlated with voting than the rural model. Also, CCP membership is positive and statistically significant in all the four models. Thus, CCP members are much more likely to vote than non-party members. The data shows that higher educated respondents are less likely to vote, but CCP members tend to be higher educated. This suggests that the sense of duty is higher among party members than collage educated nonparty members.

The results support H1 that democratic values positively influence voting behaviors. The results are in line with the theoretical assumption that democratic values, defined as sense of duty, increases the likelihood of voting. The findings appear to support Shi's (1999) argument, yet under a different rationale. The non-linear effect of education remains a strong factor for all three models, but the magnitude (z-score) of education is lower for urban respondents. In order to test the influence of education on an individual's sense of duty, we need to examine democratic values as dependent variable.

Table 6 of the Annex displays the descriptive relationship between democratic orientation and education. First, the overall measure of democratic values is relatively high. For the whole sample, 65% of the respondents display the highest level of democratic values or a sense of duty to the state. However, with 65% as the base line, Table 6 shows a clear negative relationship between education and democratic values with college educated respondents 18% below the baseline and respondents with no education 13% above. This suggests that higher levels of education, especially college, erodes democratic orientation. However, given the definition, it is more accurate to describe this result as an erosion of the respondent's perceived duty to participate in state functions such as voting.

Table 7 of the Annex shows the ordered logit regression models with democratic values as the dependent variable. Like the regression in Table 5, voting is positively associated with democratic values. However, in this case, correlation is not causation. Both voting and democratic values are viewed as a sense of duty and this varies with the level of education. Model 2 in Table 7 suggests older rural respondents are more likely to hold democratic orientation. This is also associated with education. Older respondents tend to have lower levels of education especially in the countryside. Thus, we expect them to display a high level of duty to the state.

The results support H2 that education influences democratic values and voting in the same direction. Table 7 shows that respondents with the lower levels of education are more likely to display a sense of duty to vote and participate in the political system. The results from the two regression models in Table 5 and Table 7 suggest that education drives both voting and measures of democratic orientation into the same direction. Our results differ from previous research because we start with a CCP definition of democratic values.

The results from Table 4, Table 5 and Table 7 support H3 that educated CCP members are more likely to vote than educated non-party members. Table 4 shows that CCP members are mostly higher educated, and Table 4 and Table 5 show that they are more likely to vote. Table 7 shows that CCP membership and democratic values have a negative relationship, but not statistically significant. This indicates that CCP members are more likely to fulfil their duty to vote even though they are higher educated.

The reason why higher educated respondents are less likely to vote and have a reduced sense of duty is due to the education system and indoctrination of the CCP definition of democracy, especially through compulsory education. The CCP has historically claimed to be democratic and promotes the CCP definition of democracy and political participation including the right to vote and the role of the people in decision making. Moreover, the most intensive exposure to government perspective is compulsory education. Observing American public opinion, V. O. Key (1961) argued that "formal education may serve to indoctrinate people into the more-or-less official political values of the culture" (p. 340). The effectiveness of this indoctrination may be greater in authoritarian regimes (Geddes & Zaller, 1989; Kennedy, 2009). Indeed, compulsory education in China instils the ideals of a socialist democracy that includes the right to vote and people's influence in the decision-making process, which

indoctrinates people to perceive a sense of duty to vote as democratic values.

Higher education is typically viewed as the opportunity to expand the educational experience and question the status quo. This is at the heart of the liberal democratic ideal of higher education and enlighten political views especially questioning authority. However, higher education in China does not provide this type of liberal experience, but the high school and college educational opportunities do move beyond the compulsory education particularly in the areas of career choice and specialization. Post compulsory education may have the unintended consequence of diluting the sense of political or civic duty that was instilled during elementary and middle school years. The only way to maintain the CCP democratic duty after college is to be involved in a career choice that includes CCP membership. In fact, many younger CCP members join when they were in college in order to improve their employment chances.

5. Conclusion

One of the most challenging aspects of studying authoritarian regimes, especially in China, is the problem of translation and definitions. The word democracy in China is *minzhu* and it literally translates to "People in Charge". The "people" are the face of the authoritarian leadership from the inception of the People's Republic of China to the "12 Core Socialist Values" of the 18th Party Congress. While the central leadership introduced village elections and political reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, the intention was not to democratize China from a liberal democracy perspective, but to expand the democratic duties of the "people". Most Chinese grow up hearing the words "democracy", "freedom" and "elections", but these terms do not reflect the individual rights as they are understood in liberal democracies. Instead, the terms are part of the party state lexicon including conception of the "people" and duties as well as service to the state.

When evaluating Chinese attitudes or perceptions of democracy, researchers need to discuss not only the accepted social and political definitions, but also how and where citizens can be exposed to alternative definitions. Our study started off with the CCP definition of democracy and the concept of duty rather than rights. Given this definition, the results seem to contradict previous assumptions regarding the relationship between democratic values, voting and education. While our study does not support the ideal that higher education instills liberal values even in China, a closer look suggests that our results do support the general idea that higher education can dilute state propaganda and indoctrination in compulsory education. This may have great implications for regime support in the future.

The remaining puzzle is that while most surveys still display relatively strong public support for the central leadership, a growing number of citizens are completing high school and college education especially in urban areas. In addition, China is urbanizing at a rapid pace. In order to maintain public support, the CCP aggressively promoted the "12 Core Socialist Values" during the 18th (2012) and 19th (2017) Party Congress. Thus, is the Core Socialist Values campaign generating greater trust and support for the regime or widening the gap between government rhetoric and practice?

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Annex

Table 1. Descriptive data for voting and democratic values. Source: China General Social Survey 2013.

Code	Variable Label		Percentage	Frequency
vote	Voted in last VC and RC elections (over 20)			
		Yes [1]	48%	4,922
		No [0]	52%	5,389
demo123	Democratic Values Index			
		Agree to all three [6]	65%	5,947
		Agree to two out of three [5]	25%	2,340
		Disagree to two out of three [4]	9%	817
		Disagree to all three [3]	1%	114
generation	Respondents born before and after 1968			
		Over 45 [1]	49%	5,650
		Under 45 [0]	51%	5,788
edu	Level of Education			
		No Education [1]	13%	1,484
		Elementary School [2]	23%	2,582
		Middle School [3]	29%	3,326
		High School [4]	19%	2,180
		College [5]	16%	1,863
coelect	Quality of election grassroots election: good quality is open nomination process and competitive election within the county			
		Open Elections, Yes [1]	37%	4,099
		No [0]	63%	7,123
rural	Hukou status at the time of the survey			
		Rural [1]	55%	6,333
		Urban[0]	45 %	5,083
ownhome	Respondent owns home			
		Yes [1]	50%	5,672
		No [0]	50%	5,731
class	Self-identified class status: Highest 10, Lowest 1			
		[1]	7%	788
		[2]	8%	867
		[3]	16%	1,778
		[4]	18%	2,074
		[5]	33%	3,708
		[6]	12%	1,319
		[7]	5%	518
		[8]	2%	234
		[9]	0	35
		[10]	1%	74
gender		Male [1]	50%	5,756
		Female [0]	50%	5,682
party	Chinese Communist Party member			
		Yes [1]	10%	1,161
		No [0]	90%	10,277

Table 2. Voting and democratic values for respondent over 20 years old. Source: China General Social Survey 2013.

	Democratic Values			
Voting	Low	Medium Low	Medium High	High
No	74%	65%	55%	49%
Yes	26%	35%	45%	51%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(freq)	(91)	(688)	(2,042)	(5,484)

Table 3. Voting and the level of education for respondents over 20 years old. Source: China General Social Survey 2013.

	Education Level				
Voting	No Education	Elementary	Middle	High	College
No	55%	43%	49%	56%	67%
Yes	45%	57%	51%	44%	33%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(freq)	(1,425)	(2,481)	(3,070)	(1,833)	(1,500)

Table 4. Voting and the level of education for respondents over 20 years old with CCP memberships. Source: China General Social Survey 2013.

	Education Level				
Voting	No Education	Elementary	Middle	High	College
No	37%	31%	34%	38%	57%
Yes	63%	69%	66%	62%	43%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(freq)	(41)	(108)	(218)	(260)	(469)

Table 5. Factors that influence voting in village committee (rural) and residence committee (urban) elections in China (2013) for respondents over 20 years old.

	Coefficient (z-score)			
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3 (Rural)	Model 4 (Urban)
Democratic Value	0.20 * ** (5.58)	0.19 * ** (5.22)	0.13* (2.33)	0.24 * ** (4.97)
Election Quality	0.57 * ** (11.12)	0.58 * ** (11.33)	0.53 * ** (7.60)	0.57 * ** (7.18)
Generation (age)	0.53 * ** (10.11)	0.54 * ** (10.29)	0.57 * ** (8.00)	0.59 * ** (7.16)
Rural	0.67 * ** (11.84)	0.63 * ** (10.95)		
Gender	0.06 (1.18)	0.02 (0.40)	0.14* (2.06)	−0.16* (2.21)
Education	−0.02 (0.60)	0.79 * ** (8.24)	1.05 * ** (7.28)	0.66 * ** (3.75)
Education Squared		−0.13 * ** (8.69)	−0.20 * ** (7.31)	−0.11 * ** (4.10)
Class Status	0.002 (0.11)	0.004 (0.24)	−0.002 (0.12)	0.005 (0.23)
Home Ownership	0.46 * ** (9.34)	0.44 * ** (8.80)	0.50 * ** (7.32)	0.35 * ** (4.77)
CCP member	0.48 * ** (6.19)	0.59 * ** (7.41)	1.09 * ** (6.48)	0.47 * ** (4.97)
North China	0.30 * * (3.43)	0.32 * ** (3.64)	0.40 * * (3.11)	0.14 (1.17)
Northeast China	−0.15 (1.89)	−0.18* (2.23)	0.46 * ** (4.13)	−1.00 * ** (7.52)
East China	0.14* (2.03)	0.16* (2.30)	0.18* (2.03)	0.03 (0.32)
Southwest China	0.28 * * (3.48)	0.28 * * (3.47)	0.29 * * (2.89)	0.25 (1.84)
Northwest China	−0.19 (1.88)	−0.14 (1.39)	0.07 (0.60)	−0.69 * * (3.37)
Constant	−2.42 * ** (10.02)	−3.34 * ** (12.58)	−2.80 * ** (7.52)	−3.23 * ** (7.73)

Notes: For Model 1 and 2 N = 8,073, for Model 3 N = 4,376 and Model 4 N = 3,697. *** = $p < .001$, ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$.

Table 6. Democratic values and the level of education. Source: China General Social Survey 2013.

	Education Level				
Democratic Values	No Education	Elementary	Middle	High	College
Low	0%	0%	1%	2%	3%
Medium Low	4%	6%	7%	11%	17%
Medium High	18%	19%	25%	29%	34%
High	78%	75%	67%	58%	47%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(freq)	(1,021)	(1,976)	(2,745)	(1,848)	(1,625)

Table 7. Factors that influence individual democratic values in China (2013) for respondents over 20 years old.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2 (Rural)	Model 3 (Urban)
Voting in Local Elections	0.27***	0.17*	0.37***
	(5.53)	(2.39)	(5.30)
Generational Differences	0.31***	0.44***	0.17*
	(5.86)	(5.79)	(2.26)
Education	−0.20***	−0.17***	−0.23***
	(7.96)	(4.59)	(6.74)
Gender	−0.17**	−0.13	−0.20**
	(3.48)	(1.68)	(3.03)
Class Status	−0.03	−0.04	−0.02
	(1.92)	(1.66)	(0.94)
Home Ownership	0.06	0.06	0.06
	(1.29)	(0.82)	(0.83)
Rural	0.41***		
	(7.27)		
CCP member	−0.07	−0.18	−0.008
	(0.88)	(1.25)	(0.09)
North China	−0.01	−0.11	0.09
	(0.17)	(0.86)	(0.92)
Northeast China	0.57***	0.48***	0.71***
	(6.66)	(3.81)	(5.98)
East China	0.18**	0.09	0.29**
	(2.69)	(0.99)	(3.02)
Southwest China	0.25**	0.15	0.41**
	(2.94)	(1.35)	(3.04)
Northwest China	0.27**	0.33*	0.14
	(2.60)	(2.48)	(0.83)

Notes: For Model 1 N = 8,239, for Model 2 N = 4,386 and Model 3 N = 3,853. *** = $p < .001$, ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$.